

Sexual Activity

Sexually active adolescents have an increased risk of HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases (STD's), and unintended pregnancy. Teenagers who begin having sex at younger ages are exposed to these risks over a longer period of time. Those who have had multiple sex partners (four or more sex partners in their lifetime) are at an increased risk of pregnancy, acquiring sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV infection.

- In 1999 one-half of all high school students had been sexually active.
- The proportion of students who report ever having sexual intercourse and those who report having multiple sex partners increases significantly with age. In 1999, 66 percent of female students and 64 percent of male students in the 12th grade ever had intercourse compared with 33 percent of female students and 45 percent of male students in the 9th grade.
- Overall, non-Hispanic black students, both male and female, were significantly more likely to have had sexual intercourse than non-Hispanic white and Hispanic students. Among females, non-Hispanic black students were nearly twice as likely as non-Hispanic white and Hispanic students to have had multiple (four or more) sex partners. Among males, non-Hispanic black students were twice as likely as Hispanic students and four times as likely as non-Hispanic white students to have had multiple sex partners.
- In 1999 the percent of students who reported they had sexual intercourse during the previous 3 months increased from 27 percent of 9th grade students to 51 percent of 12th grade students (1). Among currently sexually active students, 58 percent used a condom during their last sexual intercourse. The proportion of students using condoms decreased with grade level, from 67 percent of 9th grade students to 48 percent of those in 12th grade (1). Condoms are very effective at preventing the transmission of STDs and HIV, but are less effective than some other contraceptive methods at preventing pregnancy.

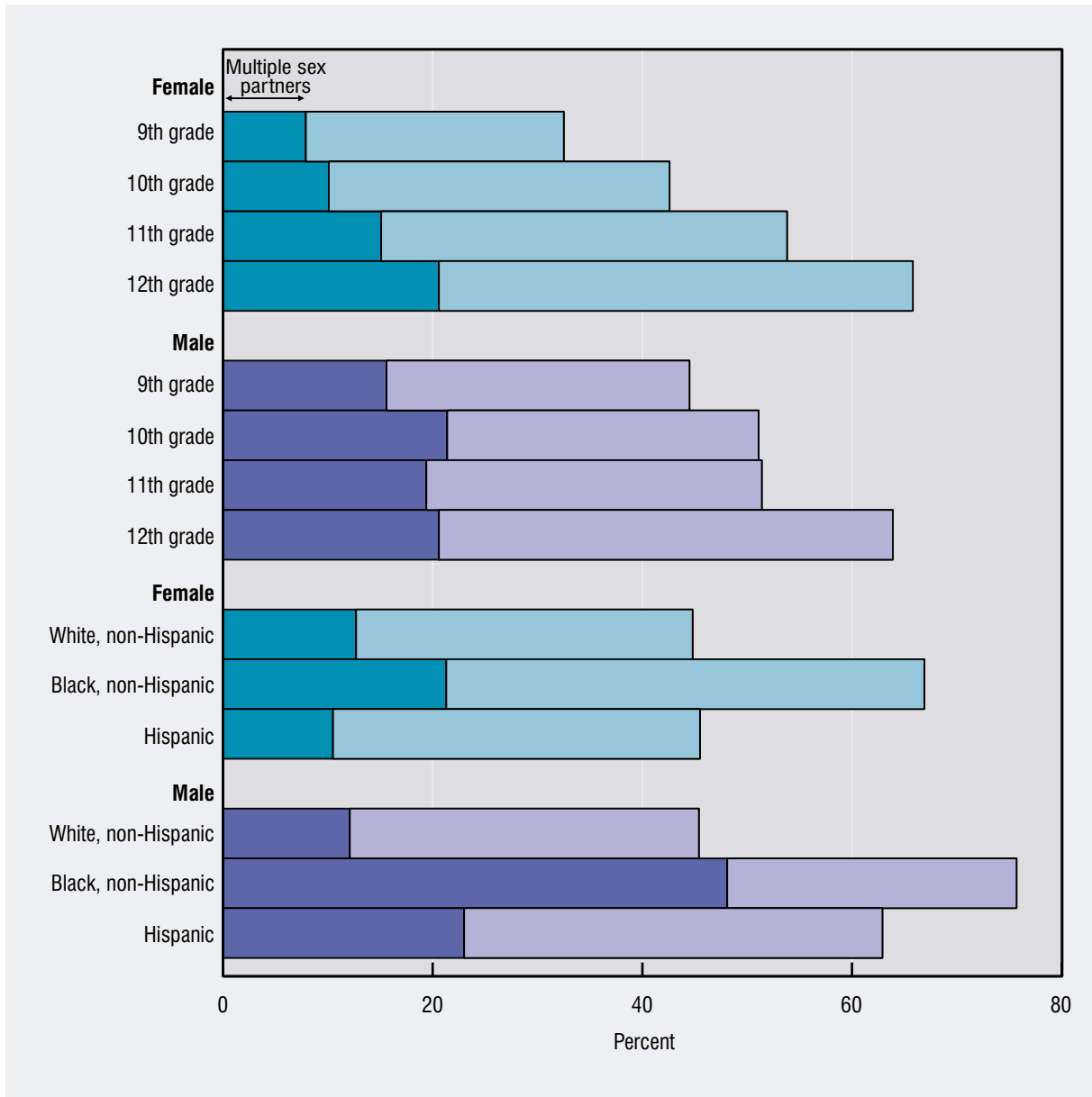
■ A Healthy People 2010 critical adolescent objective calls for an increase in the proportion of adolescents who abstain from sexual intercourse or use condoms if currently sexually active (2). This measure is also a Leading Health Indicator.

■ Between 1991 and 1999 the prevalence of sexual experience among adolescents decreased 8 percent. The prevalence of multiple sex partners decreased 13 percent (3). These behavioral changes are consistent with decreases in related reproductive health outcomes among adolescents (see figures 19 and 23).

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Survey. 1999.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2010 (Conference Edition, in Two Volumes). Washington: January 2000.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Trends in sexual risk behaviors among high school students—United States, 1991–1997. *Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 47:749–51. 1998.

Figure 25. Lifetime sexual activity among students in grades 9–12, by sex, grade level, race, and Hispanic origin: United States, 1999



NOTES: Multiple sex partners is defined as four or more sex partners in the student's lifetime. See Technical Notes for survey methods. See Data Table for data points graphed.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).